
Editor's pick

Year after year, studies show that doctors feel ill prepared to give preventive medical advice in their clinical practice. Of course, as physicians, we know the dangers of smoking, drinking, motorcycle riding, and unprotected sex. When tested, we can successfully answer multiple-choice questions on preventive medicine. But when it comes to counseling our patients about risk reduction, that is another story. If you ask students, residents, and physicians in the community why they don't counsel their patients, they often say, "It takes too much time," "nobody ever takes my advice, anyway," or "I'm not sure what to tell them." Perhaps for these reasons and others, the most effective prevention strategies are those that involve passive changes to the environment—rather than interventions by physicians—such as seat belts, airbags, and tobacco sales regulation.

But is it still worth counseling patients to change their lifestyle? This month, Teutsch and Shenkin debate this point (p 84), discussing whether preventive medicine is cost-effective to society. Osberg and Stiles (p 99) give some insight on the prevention behaviors of in-line skaters and suggest yet another area in which up-front prevention counseling may have big payoffs in health outcomes.

Whether we read a book chapter or a newspaper or journal article, we each have our own biases that color how we perceive and interpret the information. No example is more vivid than the recent presidential debates, watched by millions. If you asked people who they thought performed best, their answers varied greatly, mostly depending on their a priori biases. In this month's *wjm*, McCormack and Greenhalgh analyze the biases that may have existed in 1 of the most important studies of type 2 diabetes in decades, the UK Prospective Diabetes Study (p 123).

Finally, we extend a warm welcome to our new medical and health science student readers. We will shortly launch a new monthly section, called *Genesis*, written and edited by students; a call for papers appears on p 86. Our new student editor, Itai Danovitch, who is in his third year at UCLA School of Medicine, has brought together a talented editorial board made up of students from the western states. The team has plans for a fascinating section that will interest physicians and students alike—pages full of debate, reflection, and valuable clinical material. Welcome to the *wjm* family!